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November 5, 2015

The Honorable Chelsea City Council  
Chelsea City Hall  
500 Broadway  
Chelsea, Massachusetts 02150

Re: *Report on First Hundred Days*

Dear Councilors:

It has been a little over one hundred days since I commenced work as your City Manager. I have spent much of that time learning about the City and identifying its critical needs. I promised that by this stage in my tenure, I would be able to articulate for you and Chelsea residents my vision and priorities for the next four years. Here are my thoughts.

First, let me give you an initial impression. The City of Chelsea has had the tremendous benefit of extremely capable leadership since Receivership. As a result, its finances are incredibly strong, and its reputation is stellar. This has created enormous developer interest in the City, a situation which has only been enhanced by the ongoing Silver Line expansion. The City also has among the strongest core of community based organizations anywhere in the Commonwealth. This, combined with an incredibly diverse and vibrant constituency, makes me extremely optimistic about the City's future. I consider my role merely to ensure that the City's longstanding progress continues.

Based upon what I have discerned in the past three months, I feel there are three areas which require my attention to maintain the City's positive momentum. The priorities are: economic development; the public school system; and neighborhood/quality of life issues.

#### Economic Development

For much of the past decade, the City's development focus has been on the Everett Avenue Urban Redevelopment District. That District remains vibrant and will continue to attract keen interest given the Silver Line expansion. I do not need to nurture development here. Instead, I see the need to focus time and attention on two areas with similar potential but far less recent growth: the Broadway Business Corridor and the Waterfront.

The Broadway Business Corridor has vast untapped potential given its tremendous pedestrian activity and diverse businesses. But, the physical environment is tired and in need of substantial investment. And, there are significant social problems that need addressing, particularly the highly visible and destructive substance abuse problems. My goal is to invest heavily in this area.

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With the City Council's help, we have already begun to tackle the social problems which undermine public confidence and safety in this area. The Council's commitment to support two street outreach workers dedicated to this Corridor – known as Chelsea Community Navigators, and the Council's willingness to subsidize wrap around services for these Navigators, including clinical treatment and emergency housing funds, will start to make a difference. I promise to buttress these efforts with increased police presence in the area, including dedicated walking patrols and periodic prostitution stings.

As for the physical environment, I have commissioned the City's Planning Department to develop upgrades to the streetscape, sidewalks, facade and general geometry of the area, and to solicit ideas from partners such as The Neighborhood Developers, the Chelsea Collaborative and Bunker Hill Community College. My goal is to have a comprehensive plan for physical improvements completed for FY17, and to start the major capital investment sometime in that fiscal year.

The waterfront is the other area that needs attention. It's disheartening that much of this interesting port area is underutilized and shut off from the public. I am hopeful that the ongoing Designated Port Area boundary review will unlock the development potential of some of the waterfront parcels and create the opportunity for enhanced waterfront access. But, regardless of the DPA result, better development of the waterfront will be a high priority over the next few years.

Whether discussing future development on the waterfront or elsewhere, I firmly believe we can only move forward with a carefully developed plan. The concerns raised during the recent deliberations on the Chelsea Clock project made this need abundantly clear. For this reason, I support the Council's desire for a strategic visioning or master planning effort. I expect to propose such a visioning effort, perhaps building upon the Metropolitan Area Planning Council's ongoing Silver Line study, sometime in early 2016.

One final point. In that planning effort, I will be advocating for additional affordable housing. As you know, I am a strong advocate for affordable housing, and nothing I have seen so far has deterred me from my opinion that there still exists an overwhelming need in this community for such housing. A first step toward achieving this goal will be adoption of an inclusionary zoning ordinance which requires, in any future significant residential or commercial development, either an affordable housing component or some payment toward the Affordable Housing Trust Fund. I expect to submit such an ordinance to the City Council in early 2016.

#### **Greater Support for Chelsea Public Schools**

My second priority area is support for the Chelsea Public School System. I have been extremely impressed with the dedication and commitment of Superintendent Bourque and her entire School Department. Dr. Bourque has a clear vision for ensuring that Chelsea students are receiving a quality education, despite enormous demographic challenges. I am committed to assisting in that effort. The best way to retain and attract good families in this or any city is to have a strong school system.

Over the next four years, supporting the Chelsea School System will mean two things. First, I plan to eliminate the current net school spending deficit as promptly as possible. I expect that I will likely be advocating for higher than net school spending in every budget I submit to the City Council. Second, it means substantially expanding afterschool opportunities for our students. Toward that end, I will be seeking funding to allow for the School Department to expand the Citizens School program to grades 5-8 in all of our middle schools. I will also be seeking additional funds to increase programming in Chelsea Community Schools in order to provide additional out-of-school time opportunities for our youth. Along with Superintendent Bourque, I believe this afterschool enrichment is an essential piece to improving academic achievement.

#### **Neighborhood Quality of Life Issues**

My final priority area is investment in our neighborhoods. Although I have been here just a short time, it is clear to me that much of our neighborhood efforts work well. We have an excellent program for the creation of new parks, our water and sewer infrastructure is in reasonably good shape and well-maintained, and our Inspectional Services Department has a good handle on problem properties.

There are two areas, however, where I feel improvements can be made: street and sidewalk repairs; and beautification in general.

In my travels around the City, I have identified quite a few streets and sidewalks that need repair. My goal is to utilize the objective results of the street survey conducted by our vendor StreetScan this Fall in order to prioritize areas for repair. Then, in 2016, I will outline a multi-year program for renovation of neighborhood streets and sidewalks, ensuring that there is an equitable investment in each district in the City.

I also wish to implement a beautification and anti-litter effort, perhaps by building upon the ongoing Chelsea Shines and Community Engagement Team initiatives. I am hopeful that with some public education about littering, and some adopt-an-island type efforts to beautify small patches of the City, we might improve the perception and the reality of the City's cleanliness.

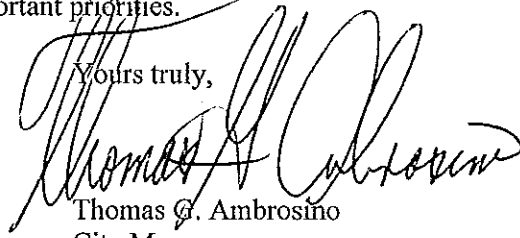
Please recognize that this is by no means an exhaustive list of all that I wish to accomplish over the next four years. I will be spending time and effort on a myriad of other issues, such as Fire Department improvements, tax and rate relief for seniors, immigration programs and gentrification concerns. But, the above does provide you with a sense as to where I will be prioritizing my attention.

Obviously, much of what I am advocating above requires additional funding. But, this City hardly lacks the resources to make the investments necessary to tackle these challenges. Due to conservative budgeting and aggressive development, the City has built significant reserves and has relatively little long term debt. I believe now is the time to harness those reserves, and the City's bonding capacity, to make the critical investments necessary to elevate the City and ensure that all of its residents benefit from the City's improved financial condition.

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I have very much enjoyed my first few months here in Chelsea. I am grateful to the City Council for the collaborative engagement we have had thus far. I look forward to the next four years in Chelsea as I work to implement these important priorities.

Yours truly,



Thomas G. Ambrosino  
City Manager

Cc: Deputy City Manager Ned Keefe